



2005 Pedestrian Plan

City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

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Department of Planning & Community Development

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I. Walking and the Community

Walking is the most fundamental mode of transportation. Here in the 21st century, developing communities have reintroduced the pedestrian as a component of the transportation network, and across the country, have begun to develop and implement pedestrian plans that are effective. As automobile use has increased over the last half century, walking has taken a backseat, so to speak, to the needs of motorists. It has not been until recently that pedestrian travel was given any serious place in the realm of modern transportation. Many communities are beginning to realize the many benefits of providing pedestrian networks that promote connectivity. Some of those benefits include:

- Accessibility to transit service
- Commuter/recreational needs
- Reduced congestion
- Better health
- Reduction of automobile trips for small trips
- Linkages between neighborhoods, parks, schools, and shopping areas.

There has been a shift in ideology over the last few decades to include pedestrians once again as a viable and important component of the transportation network. The boom of home ownership that followed World War II, growth of suburban America led to greater dependence on the automobile. During these years, many states passed laws that prevented the use of any gas tax revenues for anything but highway improvements for motorists. The highway network that resulted was very much automobile-centric and left little and usually no room for the bicyclist or pedestrian. The task of finding room for pedestrians and bicyclists was challenging in many communities due to lack of space, lack of funding, and perceived or actual lack of demand. Encouraging activities such as walking along these highways was discouraged as many felt it not only dangerous, but fraught with liability issues.

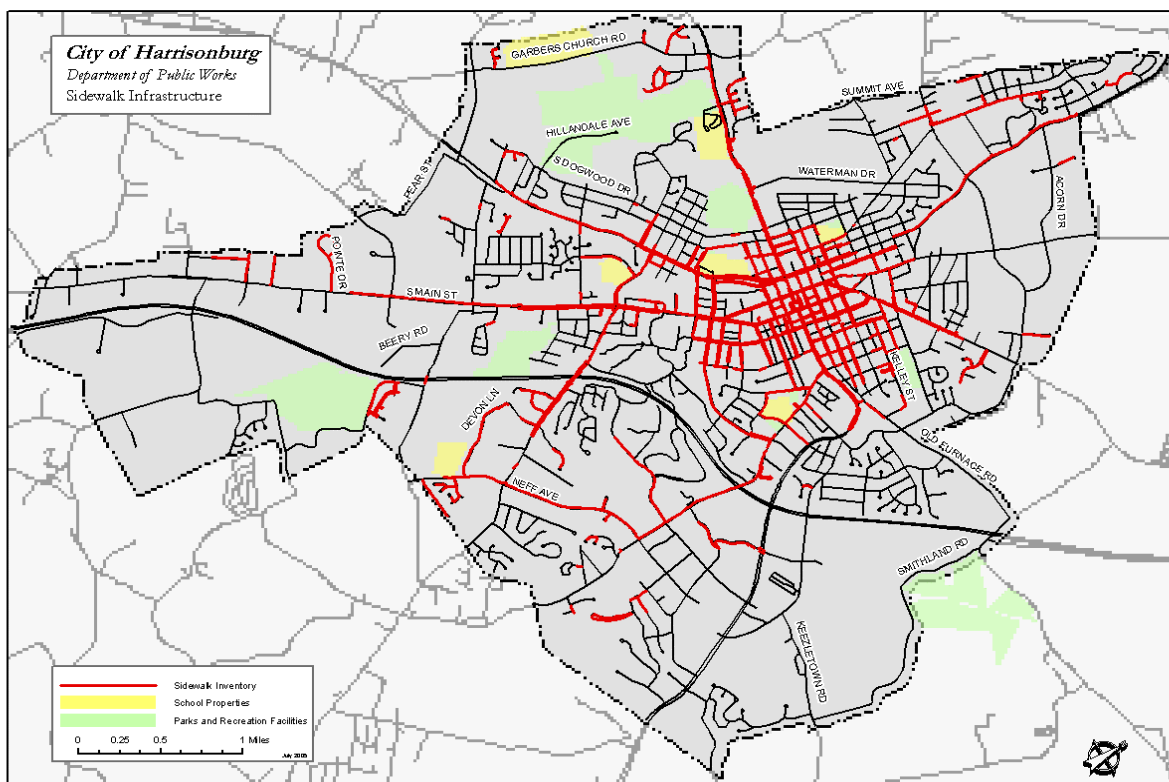
Regardless of whether we rely mostly on automobiles every day or not, we are all pedestrians at some point in any given day. Whether it's walking from our cars to access a shopping mall, walking a pet, or visiting a neighbor down the street. For this reason, the quality of a transportation network effects each of us on some level every day.

While a pedestrian network provides easy access, wheelchair friendly venues, neighborhood amenities and increased transportation options, there are also many challenges that must be planned for as well. A pedestrian network requires substantial funding for construction, additional right of way, and maintenance after construction is complete. This can also place restrictions on developable land.

Like many other communities, Harrisonburg shares in these challenges. Since 1980, the City of Harrisonburg has doubled in both land area and population. The annexation of 1983 captured all of the commercial development east of

Interstate 81 and much of the undeveloped lands to the west as well as the industrial areas of the south. As a consequence, the City inherited many streets that were not constructed to standards and generally lacked sidewalks. Strong economic growth and close proximity to regional and national transportation routes, have contributed to unprecedented growth. Harrisonburg is home to two universities – James Madison University (enrollment 15,000) and Eastern Mennonite University (enrollment 1,400). In addition, many retirees make their homes in the areas living assisted and home care facilities, making this a unique and diversified community.

Research has indicated that simply constructing sidewalks in areas do not create walkable communities. Many other factors result in the success of walkability and the amount of usage that pedestrian networks receive. These include, but aren't necessarily limited to perceived safety, topography, sidewalk continuity, street connectivity and ease of street crossings. Many of Harrisonburg's older communities support a pedestrian network with well-connected streets and have traditionally been able to accommodate pedestrians.



Current Pedestrian Facilities Network, September 2005.

The purpose of this plan is to make Harrisonburg a good place to walk. This plan will make recommendations to enhance the pedestrian environment and the opportunity to choose walking as a viable form of transportation. In order to accomplish this, the following preliminary strategies should be adhered to:

- ❖ Preserve the walkability of places that are currently good to walk;
- ❖ Better design and construction of new development to promote walkways, street crossings, street design, traffic calming measures and transit connections;
- ❖ Continue to integrate pedestrian improvements into street reconstruction projects as well as all new street construction projects;
- ❖ Educate, encourage and enforce programs to improve the safety and increase walking throughout Harrisonburg.

General Policies and Objectives:

- ❖ Create a pedestrian network that serves the entire Harrisonburg community and provides safe access to all destinations
- ❖ Construct new sidewalk facilities to be designed appropriately for accompanying street/environment, but with a minimum width of at least five feet
- ❖ Plan and construct a pedestrian network sensitive to the needs of commuters as well as recreational users
- ❖ Encourage frequent review of pedestrian needs and priorities
- ❖ Provide sidewalks on both sides of collector and arterial streets
- ❖ Coordinate improvements and share opportunities for multi-use trails in conjunction with the Bicycle Plan
- ❖ Coordinate safety and education efforts with James Madison University and Eastern Mennonite University, and Harrisonburg Public Schools
- ❖ Connect bus stops and enhance bus stops with waiting areas, bus shelters, etc.
- ❖ Coordinate with Blacks Run Greenway plans.

Challenges & Limitations

- ❖ Some major streets with significant automobile traffic volumes lack sidewalks
- ❖ Many older streets lack sufficient right of way to construct new sidewalks
- ❖ Crossing Interstate 81 poses safety threats and greatly restricts access from one side to the other.
- ❖ Interstate 81 separates most JMU off-campus housing from the Main Campus.
- ❖ Right of way costs, utility relocation hinders feasibility of sidewalk construction.
- ❖ Safety concerns either actual or perceived, may need to be enhanced along specific corridors that currently restrict pedestrian traffic.
- ❖ City Code requires property owners to remove snow from adjacent sidewalks 2 hours after snowfall.

- ❖ Bus shelters currently must obtain variance approval to be located on abutting sidewalks.

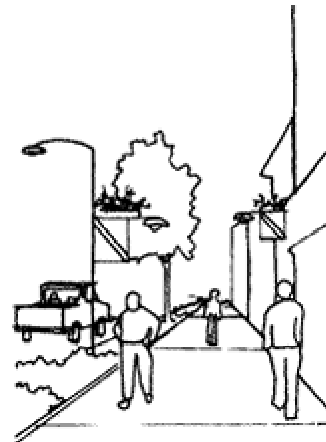
Opportunities

- ❖ New subdivision construction must provide sidewalks on at least one side of public streets.
- ❖ New by-right development requires dedication of appropriate land for sidewalk construction along frontage of property.
- ❖ New road projects include multi-modal facilities.
- ❖ The Transportation Safety Commission is an advocate of pedestrian safety.

II. Facility Design

It is important to ensure that pedestrian facilities are compatible with the type of streets they accompany. On-street or adjacent street facilities will have the most impact in providing key connections, providing linkages to areas already developed as well as areas under current development. Naturally, the most critical issue determining the walkability of a roadway is the width of the street and amount of right of way itself. Adequate pedestrian facilities may be accomplished in a number of ways, but in many cases the pedestrian sidewalk must match the roadway for which it accompanies.

In 2005, City Council approved the updated Design and Construction Standards Manual, which mandates minimum width of sidewalks to be 5 feet and also to include a 2-foot grass utility strip between the sidewalk and curb. This provides a recovery zone for pedestrians and also provides space for mailboxes to prevent them from being placed in the sidewalk structure.



*From "Making Streets that Work",
Seattle, 1996.*

Where a multi-use trail is proposed for construction, a minimum 10-foot width will be required, along with a 2-foot utility strip between the curb and multi-use trail. These types of facilities accommodate bicycles and pedestrians, and should be used along corridors with higher traffic volumes and traveling speeds.

III. Project Priorities

City Council has appropriated \$30,000 for the 2005-2006 fiscal year. With this initial commitment, the Pedestrian Committee has indicated priority areas of the city that are in need of pedestrian accommodations. The Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) is a tool that assists financial planning efforts in future budget years. Planning through the CIP will assist in achieving a complete pedestrian network.

What is changing?

The City is working at new ways to provide safe accessible pedestrian routes for all individuals. The City's Bicycle Plan has shifted prioritization from retrofitting major streets to finding safer, less traveled alternate routes. Where components of the Bicycle Plan indicate improvements on major collector or arterial streets, the City plans to construct multi-use trails to accommodate both bicyclists and pedestrians. Where possible, the Pedestrian Committee has planned to partner with the Bicycle Committee to share in development and cost of planned improvements.

General Priorities

Improved Transit Stops – a completed pedestrian network promotes use of public transportation as stops are connected with each other, and accessibility to stops is improved from residential and commercial areas. Accessibility for all users is enhanced and provided. All new sidewalk projects should consider improvements for stops, including larger waiting areas for heavily utilized stops, along with provision of shelters, benches, etc. Doing so could help consolidate stops along a particular corridor, thereby assisting in maximizing service. The Public Transportation Department has requested a new program in the annual grant received from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). This would make provisions for a proactive program to improve bus stop areas. Funding for this new program would begin in FY 2007.

As Transit routing is reviewed on an annual basis, with stops altered and sometimes removed altogether, placing improved transit stops on secondary routes should not be considered. General locations for improved stop locations include:

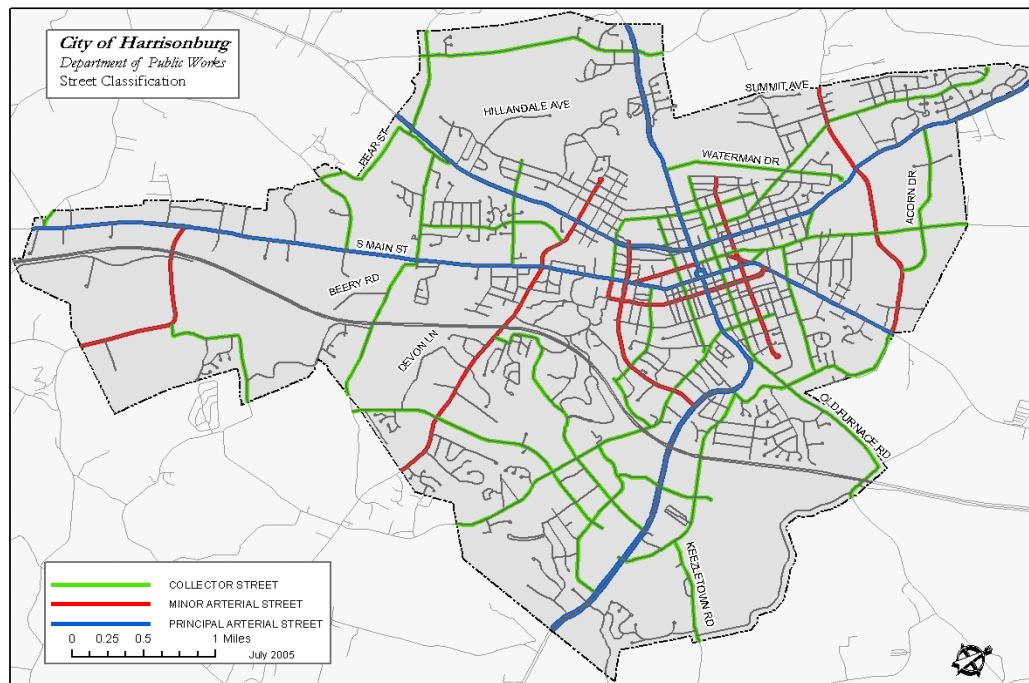
- East Market Street between Burgess Road and University Boulevard,
- Vine Street between East Market Street and North Main Street,
- South Main Street between Pleasant Hill Road and South Avenue.

These main routes are considered “backbones” of the transit network and would always be necessary in transit service.

It has also been considered to improve transit service to JMU's Memorial Hall, on South High Street. This facility has potential to serve many of transit's needs as a transfer station and assist in city passenger needs as well as JMU student needs.

Arterial and Collector Streets – As most commercial and residential growth occurs along heavier traveled streets, it is increasingly important to provide pedestrian facilities to minimize car trips. As traffic volumes have steadily increased as a result of growth in the Harrisonburg area, many motorists could easily become pedestrians for nearby trips if the infrastructure was developed to support them.

As growth has continued to occur along many corridors in the City, it is becoming necessary to ensure construction of sidewalk facilities on both sides of these heavily traveled corridors. Many collector streets were constructed with sidewalk along one side. With the adoption of the 2005 Design & Construction Standards Manual, sidewalks will be constructed on both sides of this classification of streets.



Street Classifications in the City of Harrisonburg, November 2005.

Other areas in the city planned for pedestrian improvements include:

Garbers Church Road Corridor - With additional growth accompanying completion of the Harrisonburg High School, pedestrian activity is prone to occur. This area connects parks, schools and residential areas on the western end of the City. This planned route would connect Erickson Avenue with the High School, numerous subdivisions along Garbers Church Road Sidewalks currently exist immediately in front of the high school and on other portions of Garbers Church Road to West Market Street. This multi-use facility would ultimately connect Hillandale with other neighborhoods on the northern side of the City, including connections provided to Thomas Harrison Middle School.



Mount Clinton Pike Corridor – This pedestrian corridor would link Virginia Avenue to the Northwest Community areas, most notably, residential areas in Parkview, Eastern Mennonite University. Mount Clinton Pike is currently listed in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for widening and improvement. The project is currently not scheduled for construction in the immediate future. This is a partnership

project with the Bicycle Plan as Mount Clinton Pike serves as the northern portion of the Bicycle Beltway around the City. This would connect residential areas in the northern and eastern portions of the City with Eastern Mennonite High School, and Eastern Mennonite University.

James Madison University Off-Campus Connector – as JMU enrollment continues to increase, along with the demand for off-campus housing, the City is committed to finding alternative means of transportation for students. The Connector route will be a multi-use trail facility near the Sunchase/Stonegate Apartment Complexes on Neff Avenue, connecting to the JMU Arboretum. This will provide easy access from residential areas in the eastern portion of the City to the Arboretum, along with JMU's CISAT Campus and Main Campus.

Virginia Avenue – This project would construct sidewalks between 2nd and 5th Streets linking existing sidewalks on either side. This will create a connection between the downtown community and areas in the northern portion of the community including Eastern Mennonite University and Parkview.



Vine Street – this project would include constructing sidewalks along Vine Street from East Market Street to North Main Street. This would connect numerous residential communities and provide additional access to Transit facilities.

South Avenue – this project would designate walking/bicycle areas by re-striping the pavement from South High Street to Walker Street.

Commercial Connector – many city streets in the eastern portion of the City lack sidewalk facilities that have grown considerably in the last decade. With increased development comes the need to provide pedestrian access for those that shop and work in this area. This area includes University Boulevard, Medical Avenue, Neff Avenue, Deyerle Avenue and Evelyn Byrd Avenue.

Reservoir Street Corridor – between Myers Avenue and Cantrell Avenue. To increase pedestrian safety (crossings and curb cuts) along this area and to provide access to provide a pedestrian connection with residential areas towards Market Street/Downtown with the existing sidewalk on Cantrell Avenue and the eastern end of Reservoir Street.



Blue Ridge Drive – designate pedestrian walking areas by striping the pavement in the parking lanes to help separate traffic from pedestrian activity. This has been an effective traffic calming measure in another Harrisonburg neighborhood. This will provide a safe pedestrian walkway from Country Club Road to Old Furnace Road. This also follows the route of the Bicycle Beltway.

Chesapeake & Western Trail:

The C & W Railway currently runs through the City of Harrisonburg beginning at the Smithland Park facilities, moving around residential areas in the northern portion of the city, and then directly through the center of JMU. A forthcoming Railroad Relocation study will indicate the engineering likelihood of relocating the railway around the City. The Comprehensive Plan calls for the rail bed to become a trail facility.



These prioritized areas for pedestrian enhancements will be a good step towards completing a citywide pedestrian network.

IV. Funding Sources & Implementation

Until 2005, the City had no proactive sidewalk construction line item in its budget. There was a sidewalk maintenance program that annually inventoried sidewalks and their conditions. Where needed, sidewalk segments would be scheduled for improvement. Neighborhoods in many communities, not just Harrisonburg, have been pushing for reduced vehicle speeds, that streets be made accessible to persons with disabilities, and that streetscape be improved as to make them more inviting to pedestrians. This section of the plan is devoted to necessary steps to implementing the pedestrian plan, and the funding sources to support its development.

Completion of the sidewalk and pedestrian plan will require cooperation amongst public agencies and property owners. Likewise the City faces a number of challenges it must overcome in order to provide pedestrian facilities on a community-wide scale.

- ❖ Older streets that don't have sidewalks generally lack sufficient right of way to construct sidewalks without easements or right of way from adjacent property owners.
- ❖ Right of way costs and utility placement may make sidewalk construction difficult.
- ❖ Some heavily traveled roadways do not have sidewalks.
- ❖ Maintaining a contiguous sidewalk network is critical to avoiding conflicts between pedestrians and bicyclists/automobiles.

The following table provides examples of grant opportunities through various agencies, independent of city funding.

Grant Name	Responsible Agency	Requirements
Transportation Enhancement Program (SAFETEA)	FHWA VDOT	Cost-share program (80% state, 20% local) that funds physical construction projects (sidewalks, bicycle facilities), educational materials, educational facilities, safety campaigns, etc.
Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety Program (Hazard Elimination Safety Program)	VDOT	Cost-share program (90% state; 10% local) that funds construction projects. Potential projects must demonstrate the current safety hazard and how a proposed project will eliminate the safety hazard. There is a \$500,000 limit per project application.
Recreational Access Program	VDOT/DCR	No local match required, year round application process. Primarily applied to constructing access roads for vehicles and bicycles to parks, park sites, and historic sites.
Revenue Sharing Program	VDOT	Historically geared towards counties only, this program has been opened up to Cities in 2005. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities are constructed in this program in conjunction with other road widening projects.
Transit Enhancement Grant	FHWA/VDOT	Similar to the SAFETEA Transportation Enhancement Program, legislation also makes provisions for enhancements to transit systems including the accommodations of multi-modal connections and pedestrian access.
Highway Safety Program	DMV	Mini-Grant Programs. Monies are available throughout the entire year as long as funds last. This allows localities to react to safety issues that may suddenly arise in their communities. Maximum allowable amount per grant application of \$1,500.
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)	HUD	Public projects that are located in "entitlement areas" as designated by the Department of Housing & Urban Development are eligible to receive CDBG funding.

V. Safety & Education

A safe pedestrian network insures that it will be used and available to all types of users. There are many factors that may deter residents from actively using sidewalks, including distance factors, convenience factors, perceived or actual safety limitations, and lack of education. The Harrisonburg Transportation Safety Commission has worked to develop a Pedestrian Safety Campaign. Through education, enforcement, and outreach, the campaign has been directed at preventing injuries and fatalities. The campaign encourages motorists to think like pedestrians, and pedestrians to think like motorists when navigating through city streets.

Where significant traffic volumes compete with significant pedestrian volume levels, the City has made intersection improvements through upgrading traffic signal equipment, placing high-visibility crosswalks, and restricting motorists from turning right on red at key intersections. The South Main Street corridor in front of James Madison University is an example of increasing pedestrian safety, by educating the pedestrian. The City shares pedestrian information with the community universities at the onset of all new academic years.

What is changing?

The City is exploring new ways to provide accessible options for all pedestrians. One way to reach out to disabled citizens is to enhance crosswalks with automated-push signals (APS). The City has applied for a grant through VDOT to upgrade the intersection of Grace and Main Streets as a pilot project for this type of facility. The APS tells pedestrians when to cross a street, designed specifically for the visually impaired.

The Pedestrian Safety Campaign mentioned earlier is being converted to Spanish in order to reach a broad cross-section of the community.

Goals and Recommendations:

1. Collaborate with the Police Department and Transportation Safety Commission in reviewing high-risk accident intersections/locations to enhance pedestrian safety.
2. Recommend teaching pedestrian safety to children through school programs.
3. Promote the establishment of a "Safe Routes to Schools" Program in Harrisonburg.
4. Enforce the snow removal ordinance along major arterial and collector streets with sidewalks.
5. Continue to partner with James Madison University and Eastern Mennonite University with pedestrian safety programs during orientation for new students.
6. Form a pedestrian-bicycle advocacy group to work with city staff in reviewing development, and changing needs. This group would meet on a regular basis.

Conclusion

This plan has been developed by a citizen group and endorses the recommendations contained herein. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of a completed transportation network. Doing so, promotes advantages for the community including reduced automobile-related congestion, education, awareness, improved quality of life, and a healthy lifestyle. It is important to realize that as needs change, pedestrian needs change as well. The Bicycle & Pedestrian Advocacy Commission has been requested by both the Bicycle Plan Committee and the Pedestrian Plan Committee to work on an on-going basis with staff. Community needs constantly change, and it is imperative that plans be flexible to change with those needs.

Glossary

Arterial Street – this type of street serves the major centers of activity in urbanized areas, supports the highest traffic volumes entering and leaving the urban area.

CIP – Capital Improvement Program. A budgeting planning tool used by localities to project revenues, expenditures, and prioritize capital projects over the next six years.

Collector Street – this type of street provides land access and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods, and commercial/industrial areas.

FHWA – Federal Highway Administration responsible for overseeing all federal street and road projects.

MPO – Metropolitan Planning Organization, responsible for developing long range transportation plans, and financing road/street projects over a geographic area incognizant of political boundaries. The Harrisonburg-Rockingham MPO was formed in 2002 and is comprised of the City of Harrisonburg, portions of the County of Rockingham and the Towns of Bridgewater, Dayton and Mount Crawford.

Multi-Modal – containing multiple components for different types of users. A multi-modal street network makes provisions for pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles.

Multi-Use Trail or Path—wide sidewalk at least 10' in width that can be used by both pedestrians and bicyclists.

SAFETEA – Federal transportation enhancement grant used for increasing transportation choices. Predecessors of the SAFETEA program have been TEA-21 (1998) and before that, ISTEA (1991).

VDOT – Virginia Department of Transportation. VDOT has governing authority over all state roads. The City of Harrisonburg is a Class A City defined by the

Code of Virginia, thereby transferring authority of the city street network to City Council and the Department of Public Works.

Fiscal Year – the budget calendar year, which in most local governments begins July 1 and ends June 30.

DCR – Department of Conservation Resources – a state department with oversight regarding the use of natural resources and works closely with the Department of Transportation, Department of Historic Resources and localities.

Project Name	Description	Priority	Cost
Garbers Church Road	Construct sidewalks/multi use trail on Garbers Church Road (connecting Erickson Avenue with Westover Park)	Specific current CIP Project	Pending Finalization
Mount Clinton Pike Corridor*	Construct Multi-Use trail connecting Virginia Avenue with Chicago Avenue.	Specific current CIP Project	\$300,000
Virginia Avenue	Continue sidewalks between 2 nd & 5 th Streets.	Specific current CIP Project	\$47,250
James Madison University Off-Campus Connector*	Construct multi-use trail to connect from Neff Avenue to Arboretum Trail	Budgeted '05-'06	\$45,000
Blue Ridge Drive*	Paint walking areas shared with parking lanes.	'06-'07	\$3,500
Reservoir Street Corridor	Improve Sidewalks from Myers Avenue to Cantrell Avenue.	'07-'08	\$188,000
Commercial Connector	Construct sidewalks on Neff Avenue, University Boulevard and Evelyn Byrd between University and Burgess.	'08-'09	\$243,250
Chesapeake & Western Trail	Construct multi-purpose trail	As funds are available	N/A
South Avenue*	Stripe designated walking/bicycle/parking areas on existing pavement from South High Street to Walker Street	'07-'08	\$3,500
Vine Street; Phase I	Construct sidewalk from East Market Street to Old Furnace Road.	Within 15 years	\$255,000

* denotes shared priority on the City's Bicycle Plan.

